

WASHINGTON – The good will in the House chamber was plentiful Tuesday night but that didn't stop some of Orange County's lawmakers from panning the substance of President Barack Obama's economic speech.

"The key question here is not the rhetoric," said Rep. Ed Royce. "It's how do you possibly borrow enough money from China in order to fund the massive increase in government expenditure that has been proposed?"

With Obama's approval ratings still above 60 percent and his presidency brand new, the Republicans didn't give him the kind of treatment that an opposing party sometimes does at speeches like this. For the most part Republicans stood up when their Democratic colleagues did, with Minority Leader John Boehner usually leading the way. There was no booing.

As Obama walked in the chamber the traditional prolonged standing ovation was accompanied by lawmakers trying their best to shake the president's hand.

Rep. Loretta Sanchez had gotten to the chamber a couple of hours before the speech and staked out a spot close to the aisle. She greeted – with hugs and kisses – senators on both sides of the aisle. And when Obama approached she leaned in and whispered something to him.

After the speech Sanchez wouldn't say what she told the president but said she liked what she heard from the podium.

"One of the best things I liked was when he said how every American should take a pledge to take at least a year of some sort of training or education," said Sanchez, D-Garden Grove.

Sanchez said the president has been giving the American people the hard truth for his first month in office and believes the speech did a good job of being more positive.

"I'd give him a B or B plus" for style and inspiration," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach, who wrote speeches for President Reagan. "What he didn't do well was get into the meat of what he's really proposing."

When Obama said "We will rebuild, we will recover," that was inspirational, Rohrabacher said. So was his story about the young South Carolina girl who told Congress in a letter that students like her aren't quitters.

"Obviously he's a very good communicator," said Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Corona. "I think he set out his priorities. He wasn't setting my priorities."

Calvert said he hopes he can find common ground with the new president. But like his GOP colleagues, Calvert wants to know how Obama will pay for his call for health care reform, a fix to global warming and higher education for everyone.

"He talked about bringing down the deficit but at the same time talked about these new programs," Calvert said. "That's why the devil is in the details. We've got to understand the cost of this."

Obama's promise to end the deficit seemed hollow to Rep. John Campbell, who watched the speech from his home in Irvine where he is recuperating from surgery.

"I was profoundly disappointed," Campbell said. "I was really struck by the fact that he talks about reducing the deficit and then a half hour of the speech was about how everyone would have free health care, free education, spend more money on everything."

While Orange County's Republicans weren't signing on to the specifics of Obama's speech, Democrats liked what they heard.

When Obama asked Congress to send him a global warming bill that caps carbon pollution and focuses on more renewable energy California Sen. Barbara Boxer leapt to her feet shouting "yes." New York Sen. Chuck Schumer turned around the two high-fived each other as the Democrats all got to their feet. Republicans did not.

"President Obama has it exactly right: we must 'transform our economy, protect our security, and save our planet from the ravages of climate change," said Boxer, who chairs the Environment and Public Works Committee. "We will work in partnership with the President and we will answer his call."